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Performance of the programme of work and budget, including implementation of the resolutions of the Environment Assembly

Progress made in the implementation of resolution 2/21 on sand and dust storms

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to resolution 2/21 on sand and dust storms, in which the United Nations Environment Assembly, among other things, requested the Executive Director to, within the programme of work and available resources, support member States, in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities and other partners, in addressing the challenges of sand and dust storms through the identification of relevant data and information gaps, policy measures and action, and also requested the Executive Director to report on progress in the implementation of the resolution to the United Nations Environment Assembly. Since then, the United Nations Environment Programme, in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities and other partners, has implemented a number of activities and further strengthened partnerships with other United Nations entities in addressing the challenges of sand and dust storms.

* UNEP/EA.3/1.

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I. Introduction

1. At its second session, held in May 2016, the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted resolution 2/21 on sand and dust storms. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of that resolution.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 2/21

2. The United Nations Environment Programme implemented the following activities on sand and dust storm mitigation pursuant to resolution 2/21:

(a) The findings of the global assessment of sand and dust storms, which was conducted by the Environment Programme in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, were made available at the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in September 2016. The report[1] provides a comprehensive overview of the global distribution of sand and dust storms, their drivers, sources and impacts and provides a policy framework for action, outlining possible solutions for mitigating both sand and dust storm sources and their harmful impacts. The assessment engaged a wide network of global, regional and national experts on different aspects of sand and dust storms;

(b) A draft policy framework for sand and dust storms (ICCD/COP(13)/19 and Corr. 1) was developed by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization for discussion at the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification;

(c) Several international meetings on sand and dust storms were supported, including the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, held in Tehran in July 2017, hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in cooperation with the Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as other relevant United Nations entities. The outcome of the Conference was a ministerial declaration in which the participants agreed to cooperate on combating sand and dust storms at the subregional, regional and international levels, accompanied by a set of technical recommendations. Another important international meeting was the International Workshop on Sand and Dust Storms, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in October 2016, hosted by the Government of Turkey with the participation of countries in the region and the technical cooperation of the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the World Meteorological Organization and the Environment Programme, as well as the International Workshop on Middle East (Regional) Dust Sources and Their Impacts, held in Istanbul in October 2017;

(d) The Environment Programme supported countries, for example Bahrain, in developing air quality strategies and action plans, including on issues relating to combating sand and dust storms;

(e) Technical articles on sand and dust storms were prepared for various outlets to bring broader public attention to the issue of sand and dust storms and to communicate the importance of the problem, its causes and impacts and mitigation options, including the *United Nations Environment Programme Annual Report* and the forthcoming Frontiers 2017 Report and the third edition of the *World Atlas of Desertification*;

(f) The Environment Programme began preparation of a strategy to guide its work on sand and dust storms over the next several years, based on the recommendations of the global assessment of sand and dust storms.

[1] United Nations Environment Programme, World Meteorological Organization and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, *Global Assessment of Sand and Dust Storms* (Nairobi, 2016).

III. Recommendations and suggested action

3. The United Nations Environment Programme continues its work to address the challenges of sand and dust storms, through the identification of relevant data and information gaps, policy measures and action, and to continue to engage with all relevant United Nations entities to promote a coordinated approach to combating sand and dust storms globally, including through the following activities:

(a) In consultation with relevant United Nations entities and other partners, prepare a strategy for guiding the activities of the Environment Programme to mitigate sand and dust storms and their impacts, building on the recommendations from the global assessment of sand and dust storms. These include a scientific integrated assessment to identify dust sources, their causes and cost-effective source mitigation measures; the assessment and promotion of cost-effective green technology options; and measures for better linking early warning systems to preparedness processes and health and emergency services;

(b) Implement activities on sand and dust storm mitigation towards achieving the 2030 outcome of the Environment Programme medium-term strategy for the period 2018–2021 on chemicals, waste and air quality, namely, improvement of air quality leading to reduced negative impacts from air pollutants on environmental and human health, especially in relation to the following indicators: reduced loads of sand and desert storm aerosols in ambient air and reduced number of deaths due to human exposure to outdoor air pollution levels above the World Health Organization air quality guideline values;

(c) Take note of the request to the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/219 on combating sand and dust storms.

4. Resources to implement resolution 2/21 have been very limited to date and additional core and extrabudgetary resources are required to further develop activities on sand and dust storm mitigation.

5. The United Nations Environment Assembly may wish:

(a) To encourage member States and stakeholders to increase their engagement and support, including financial resources, to implement the recommendations from the global assessment of sand and dust storms to mitigate anthropogenic sources of sand and dust storms and to protect human health, infrastructure and other valuable assets from the damaging effects thereof;

(b) To urge member States and the Environment Programme to bring to wider public attention the damaging effects of sand and dust storms and cost-effective options for source and impact mitigation;

(c) To encourage member States to develop national plans to combat sand and dust storms and to collaborate at the regional and subregional levels for collective action to combat cross-border transport of sand and dust.